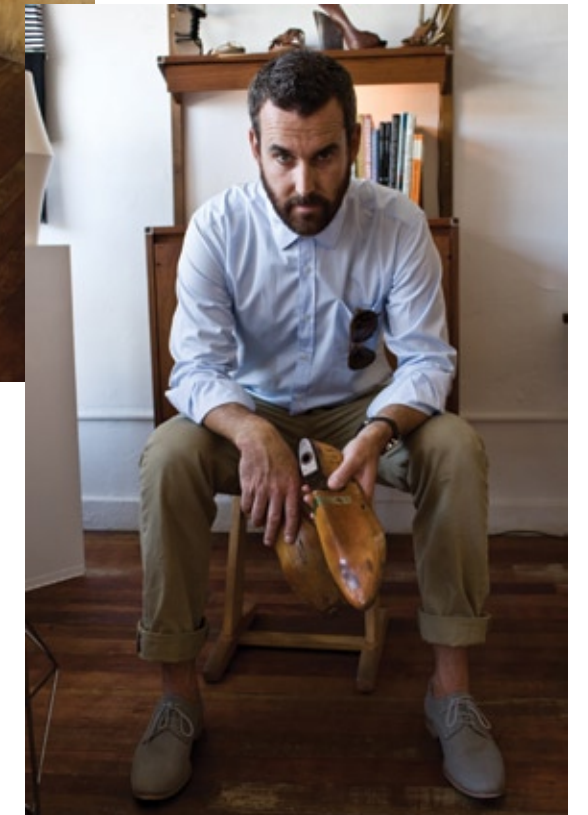


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Photographed by JONATHAN HO

# KEVIN CARNEY

The designer of The Generic Man is anything but.



In fashion, there is no greater insult than "generic." Nameless, anonymous, inconspicuous: generic means certain death. So naming your label The Generic Man is both a huge risk and a humble endeavor. For Kevin Carney, co-founder and designer behind The Generic Man, a line of classic men's (and more recently, women's) shoes, the goal is simple, but lofty. No identifying logos or markings, no flashy buckles or "edgy" details. Few labels have the faith in their customer to make the distinction between brandless and merely bland. Even fewer designers believe that their customers have the confidence to forgo corporate logo in favor of personal credo.

That's the trust Kevin Carney puts into the hands—or rather, on the feet—of his customers. Started in 2006 with business partner and friend Brandon Day, TGM shoes were intended to be a cool drink of water in an era of over-caffeinated style. The line, now in its sixth season, is known for its impeccable craftsmanship and quality. All materials, from leather to laces, are sourced in Italy and constructed in a 100-year-old, family-run factory in Porto, Portugal. The look is classic—brogues and wingtips, cap toes and oxfords—but with an undone vibe and the slightest hint of good humor. To call them plain would be to miss the point.

Almost instantly, TGM shoes started appearing in fashion magazines and on the manicured hooves of celebrities—all of which was lost on Carney. "I get a kick out of seeing the shoes on my brother, my dad, my friends. I like to see how they wear them and how they wear them in." He draws his inspiration from this close-knit coterie and from a vast vintage archive he's built up for close to two decades. He cites military garments and Americana from the '20s, '30s, and '40s as proof that the best styles are ones

with longevity—quality materials meant to last and classic styles that transcend trend.

"My pet peeve is seeing a guy who gets everything right—except the shoes," groans Carney. "I just want to tap that guy on the shoulder and say, 'Here, wear these. You'll have better posture, better conversations, and you'll live a healthier life. You might even get a few compliments.' Shoes can make the man, but they can also break the man."

When the style mavens at Urban Outfitters approached him to do a line of more casual shoes for their stores, he turned again to his vintage archive, and the line, Generic Surplus, used canvas and rubber to skate-park-meets-military-base effect. After national exposure from Urban Outfitters, the world came knocking. Established designers like Steven Alan, art magazine *Arkitip*, and even the tongue-in-chic Ace Hotel in Palm Springs all wanted to rub up against the fledgling anti-brand. Carney and Day have lined up collaborations and diffusion lines with a handful of companies for 2010, revealing only that their plans include a leisure sports line and experiments with impermeable materials, like waxed cotton and taped seams. The Generic Man is slowly crafting its identity, and as the tale carefully unfolds, it becomes obvious that it finds its roots in the carefully curated life of its creator.

Despite the overwhelming success of TGM, Carney's found a way to relegate designing to only a portion of his life. In late 2008, he and wife, Bo, opened Mohawk General Store, a no-fail zone of clothes, accessories, shoes, and décor in L.A.'s Echo Park. The rest of his free time is devoted to music, which infuses and informs his designs. The self-proclaimed audiophile scours record shops and online auctions for vinyl and vintage audio equipment.

A T-shirt he designed for the twentieth anniversary of acid house—a genre of house music that took off in late 80s London—swiftly became a collector's item. It read "Acid Haus" across the front, combining modernist graphics of the Bauhaus movement, and was, in Carney's words, "a musical release on a graphic level." Acid Haus has since morphed into a T-shirt label that he seeds out to three or four hand-picked shops globally.

And there's Blackdisco, another label of his, this one music, not clothing. What began as a passion for vinyl turned into an obsession with disco ("a mis-defined, misunderstood, and mis-categorized genre of music") he shared with friend Andrew Hogge. He (DJ Nitedog) and Hogge (Lovefingers) began hosting a disco night at an Echo Park bar, mixing obscure disco tracks into danceable, fresh jams. Shortly thereafter, they were releasing 45s of their best work. They're now on their sixth volume of Blackdisco and have started a DJ residency at Ace Hotel Palm Springs, where they host day-long poolside parties.

There's a pattern here. He admits that the work he does is less design, more re-contextualizing. It's the same idea behind Blackdisco, Acid Haus, Generic Surplus, and The Generic Man. It's the same concept that finds him spending more time at flea markets and vintage stores than fashion shoots and industry parties. It's the same force that drives him to rebuild a turntable from the '70s in order to get the most authentic sound out of a forgotten The Jackson Sisters track. Carney's goal is to make the past more modern and the future more classic. A generically perfect idea. ☒

For more information visit [TheGenericMan.com](http://TheGenericMan.com).



Photography: JHePhotography.com